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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000229

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE AND NEA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [TU](#) [SY](#) [SA](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [US](#)

SUBJECT: MFA U/S: TURKEY'S MIDDLE EAST APPROACH "UNCHANGED"

REF: A. ANKARA 207

[1](#)B. ANKARA 176

Classified By: Ambassador James Jeffrey, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. MFA Undersecretary Apakan told the Ambassador February 11 that Turkey's Middle East policy remains focused on encouraging Palestinian and Arab unity, and that Ankara assured Palestinian Authority leader Abbas that it views him as the only Palestinian president and that Palestinian unity should occur "under his umbrella." Apakan emphasized that Turkey maintains a strong strategic relationship with Israel, and that working for Arab unity does not mean that Turkey is now "pro-Arab." He said President Gul had a successful visit to Saudi Arabia, where he discussed the need for Arab unity with both King Abdullah and FM Faisal, and that Gul would convey the same message to Egyptian President Mubarak in Istanbul February 11. Apakan said Ankara hopes to convene a "summit" soon between Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Turkey and the Palestinians. The Ambassador welcomed all this but said that continuing anti-Semitic propaganda such as briefly seen on a governing party Ankara bureau website was making our job of selling the Turkish arguments more difficult. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) In a February 11 meeting with the Ambassador, Turkish MFA Undersecretary Apakan underscored that Turkey's basic approach to the Middle East is unchanged. " Hamas is not at the core of our Middle East Policy." Apakan emphasized that, contrary to some recent press commentary, Turkey maintains a good relationship with Israel. He noted that he has just invited his counterpart from Tel Aviv, MFA Undersecretary Abrahmowitz, to visit Ankara. President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan had both made positive public pronouncements regarding Israel. "Our relationship with Israel is a strategic one," Apakan said. "Our policy remains unchanged."

[1](#)3. (C) Apakan said President Gul had used his "successful" visit to Saudi Arabia and his one-on-one meeting there with King Abdullah to encourage Arab unity. Gul had also made these points with FM Faisal. Turkey believes that Saudi Arabia should play a role in encouraging solidarity and friendship among the Arab states. The Saudis may have "question marks" about Syria, Iraq (i.e., Maliki) and Iran, Apakan noted, but at the end of the day, Saudi Arabia is an important element.

[1](#)4. (C) The recent visit to Ankara by Palestinian Authority leader Abbas (REF A) also had taken place in a positive atmosphere, Apakan said. The Turkish Government had told Abbas that it regards him as the only Palestinian president, and that it is "under his umbrella" that Palestinian unity

should occur. Fatah complains about Hamas, but they do not dispute the need for a dialogue with Hamas. Ankara had told Abbas that it is interested in convening a "summit" between Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria, Egypt and the Palestinians. Abbas's meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan had gone well. Abbas had left satisfied.

¶5. (C) Apakan said the same messages would be conveyed to Egyptian President Mubarak during his meeting in Istanbul February 11 with President Gul. Turkey acknowledges that Egypt plays an important role in the Middle East. Turkey will continue to support Egypt. MFA Director General for the Middle East Huseyin Dirioz noted that Turkey plans to attend the donor conference for the reconstruction of Gaza that Egypt will host in March. Apakan said that Turkey's Middle East policy is focused on Saudi Arabia, Abbas and Egypt. He said Turkey's approach is the same as US Middle East Envoy Senator Mitchell. Encouraging the unity of the Palestinians and the Arabs does not mean that Turkey is now "pro-Arab."

¶6. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that Hamas needs to accept the three prerequisites as laid out by the Quartet. Apakan insisted that Ankara has always reminded Hamas that it alone has the means to establish its own legality, that it should decide whether it wants to be a political or a terrorist organization. Turkey and the U.S. do not differ in this message, Apakan said. "The tone may be different, but the basics are the same."

¶7. (C) COMMENT: As we have reported previously, post-Gaza, post-Davos, the pros in the MFA are trying to walk back both

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the US/Western impression of a Turkish "tilt" towards the dark side, as well as the substance of some of the more pro-Hamas/Syria positions. The Gul Saudi trip, and the Mubarak and Abbas visits underscore the reemergence of a more "balanced" Turkish position.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>

Jeffrey